

Alexandria Times

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Celebrating National Preservation Month

This year, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has designated this year’s theme “Harnessing the Power of Place.” Alexandria has a long history of preserving its historic buildings, starting in 1946, when the Old and Historic District was the third historic district established nationally.

In 2024, the Office of Historic Alexandria was honored by Preservation Virginia for its preservation work on the Murray-Dick-Fawcett House, one of Alexandria’s oldest and best-preserved residential structures. Another Office of Historic Alexandria site that has received extensive restoration work is the Freedom House Museum, which is undergoing a rehabilitation process expected to be completed by this December.

National Preservation

Month started as National Preservation Week in 1973. In 2005, the National Trust expanded the celebration from a week to the entire month of May to allow for a fuller exploration of buildings and spaces of historical significance in a larger American history.

The Murray-Dick-Fawcett House, at 517 Prince St., is one of the earliest homes in the city, and possibly the least altered 18th century home in Northern Virginia. The 0.3-acre lot contains a 1770s timber and brick dwelling and a small garden. This was one of the few still-standing buildings dating back to the American Revolution.

The house has been recognized by local historians as a “fascinating microcosm of the complete single-family dwelling, containing in addition to the usual living, dining and

bedrooms a kitchen, a necessary rooms for slaves or servants and storage rooms, all under one roof.”

The property was acquired by the City of Alexandria in 2017, with the support of conservation trust funds. It is to be used in perpetuity as a historic site, vest-pocket park and garden, creating new open space in Old Town and preserving this nationally significant architectural and cultural resource for residents and visitors.

The former owner has tenancy in the house, with public access for special events. In the future, the house will be operated as a museum and educational center focused on domestic life in Alexandria during the 18th and 19th centuries. The house recently completed a multi-year, two-phase exterior restoration that began in 2021, ensuring

the preservation of its architectural integrity.

This month will include a Toast to Joe Reeder, the former owner turned tenant, who is turning 98 years old. Harnessing the power of place is more than a theme in Alexandria, and the Murray-Dick-Fawcett highlights one of the many ways the Office of Historic Alexandria accomplishes that mission.

For more information on Historic Preservation in Alexandria, please visit alexandriava.gov/Preservation. For tickets to the Peeling Back the Layers Tour at Gadsby’s Tavern Museum, A Toast to Joe Reeder and timed entry tours to the Freedom House Museum, please visit shop.alexandriava.gov.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.